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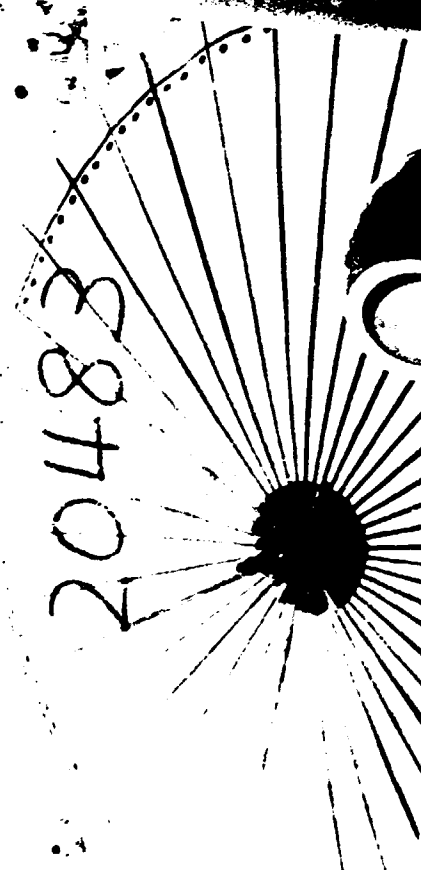
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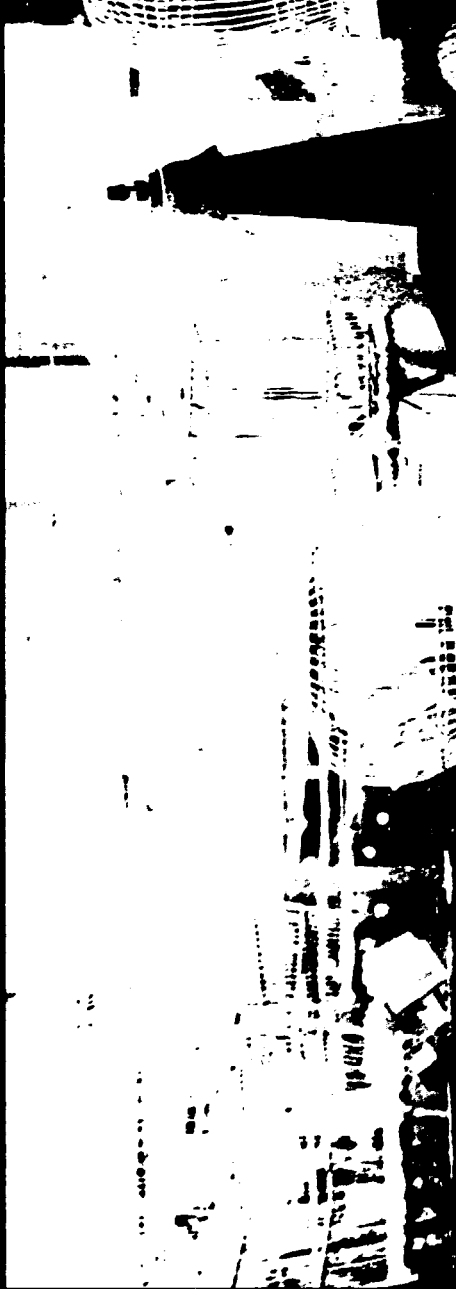
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HANDICRAFT INNOVATION THROUGH IMAGE-BUILDING AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP CUM PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES

An ASEAN Regional Project

This project is jointly funded by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and conducted by the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) in partnership with the Ministry of Industry, the Government of the Philippines (Product Development and Design Center of Science and Technology) and the Department of Trade and Handicrafts Promotion Division, under the leadership of the Government of Malaysia (Malaysian Handicraft Development Board).



**INTRODUCTION:
FROM PERAK TO PARIS**

In September 1991, Paris was the recipient of ideas and energy under the auspices of a grant awarded to the ASEAN Development Programme (ADP) and executed by the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO). 36 entrepreneurial producers from the ASEAN region Association of Southeast Asian Nations met in Geneva, Switzerland, to discuss the ADP's most important projects. The majority of the participants were from Malaysia and Singapore and beyond the region were represented by members of ASEAN countries.



The project's purpose was to promote the image of the ASEAN region as a source of reliable producers of high quality handcrafted products, an image which had been tarnished in recent years by a preponderance of cheap items of synthetic, threatening the handicraft industry's capacity to respond to opportunities for growth. The project addressed the critical question of how to preserve the heritage of traditional, often intensive, handcraft techniques and ethnic character, while demonstrating that high quality is not only to be found in antiquaries or in fine reproductions, but also in contemporary objects. Handicrafts redefined as cultural products could open up potential possibilities for the private sector, including the local market. Women and young people, for whom this industry has been an important source of employment

The journey to Paris was arduous one, but resulted for some of the products in a direct flight from the retail factory onto the pages of such prestigious journals as *Metropolitan Home* and *Logos*, and into the show rooms of Galeries Lafayette, Bazar

Benaki, and Christian Dior, after a brief stopover at "Scenes d'Interieur."

Another tangible effect of this image building venture was that many of the producers returned home to expand, and in some cases to double and even treble their operations, thus generating new entrepreneurial initiatives, and providing much needed jobs for their regions.

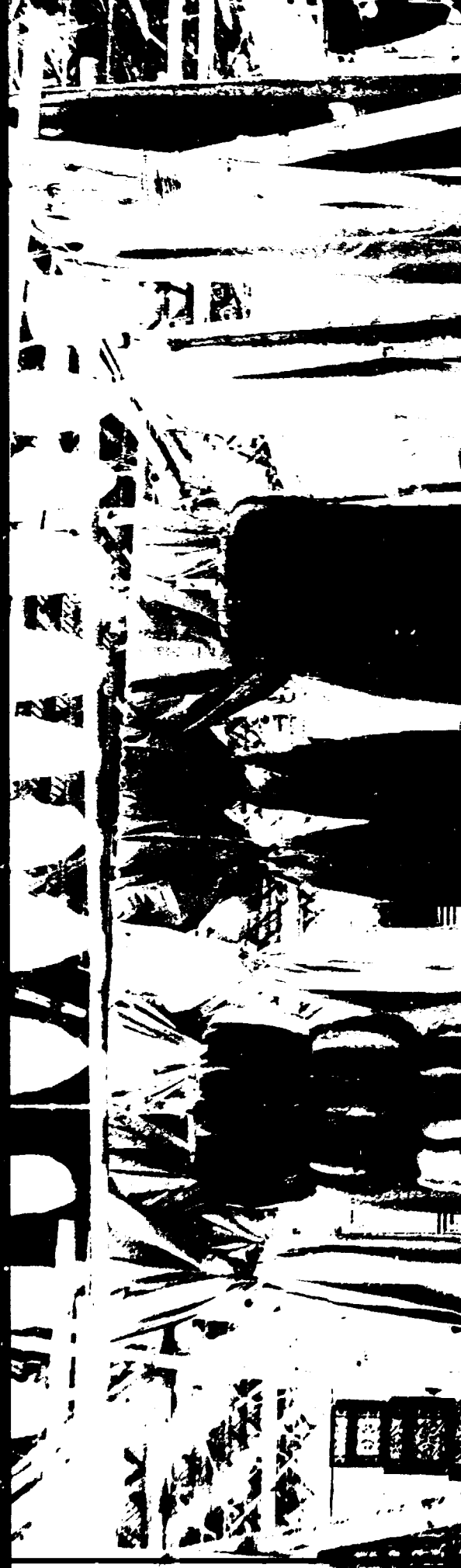
The project had the unique opportunity to stage an exhibition in the Museum of Ethnology, Vienna. The Museum lent its magnificent marble pillared vestibule to the ASEAN exhibit, where the products were displayed in their natural cultural context, among an outstanding collection of antique artifacts that were their source and inspiration.

The ASEAN regional project drew, in fact, from many sources and resources, but most importantly, from those people who have carried their cultural handicraft heritage into the present, and have been willing and able to revitalize it with innovative ideas.

Extensive interrelated preparations preceded the experience in Europe. The project integrated a package of technical assistance inputs in institution building, training and technical advice, in the areas of trend awareness, design, production and marketing. The diverse multiple activities then culminated in the realties of participation in a prestigious international fair and a museum exhibition.

The project was itself an entrepreneurial venture, a feat of coordination and cooperation under trying, at times seemingly impossible, circumstances, surmounted by "doing whatever it takes." This venture not only achieved its image building ends, but was also a valuable experience in regional cooperation and in entrepreneurship development, reaching out to rural producers.







women and young entrepreneurs and in expanding an export market and providing jobs. The project has a so-called institutional legacy of people trained to carry it on. The year following the "Scenes d'Interieur" experience has seen a continuum of national fairs, fests and itinerant exhibitions. It is hoped that telling the story will provide a useful illustration by which its impact can continue to be spread.

IMAGE BUILDING: THE BIG PICTURE

The ASEAN Regional Handicrafts Project came into being in the late 1980s through a fruitful marriage of two approaches. The first was an innovative strategy for training handicraft entrepreneur-producers to become aware of, keep abreast of, and respond to western market trends while developing products with a distinctive cultural identity and perfect the traits of their heritage. This would enable them to broaden their creative view to meet current market demands by simulta-

neously embracing the past and future, and incorporating eastern and western influences. The strategy was devised by Paola Navone, an international design, marketing and image building expert.

The double designation "entrepreneur producer" reveals an essential feature of the methodology. The selected participants were not only able to create aesthetically appealing and technically viable handcrafted objects, but also to acquire skills in imaging and marketing products, and in discerning how to adapt them for reaching a particular market at a specific time and place.

The UNIDO project management officers had long been developing and promoting integrated approaches to entrepreneurial development. They

conceived, formulated, and organized the project, providing a framework for Ms. Navone's strategy, based on a unique comprehensive approach to fostering entrepreneur ship by providing technical assistance not only at the enterprise level, but also with an eye to building institutions in the individual countries and the ASEAN region which could carry on the work long after the project's termination.

To that end, two groups of counterparts in the four participating countries were sought: national technical focal points appointed from the directorates of established small industry promotion and/or craft-oriented agencies, and national experts, who combined experience in product design and a capacity for entrepreneurial promotion. Thus the

project tapped into and helped to expand and link the handicraft networks already in place.

With financial support secured from UNDP, the first Steering Committee Meeting was held in 1989, where the UNIDO framework for regional cooperation was adopted as the basis for the project. Paola Navone and Philip Cutler, well known for his work on handicrafts in Asia, were engaged as international experts. The meeting signalled the launching of a series of multiple, simultaneous activities.

REGIONAL COOPERATION: "HANDS ON" OR "HANDS OFF" ?

The first phase of the project combined training and information gathering activities, and set the communications and operations network into motion. The national experts were responsible for absorbing technical information in intensive one on one sessions during the international experts' short visits,





SHOPS, SHOWS, STOPS BY UNIDO
 THROUGHOUT THE PROJECT AREA
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and for conveying it to the entrepreneur producers, while working to nurture their product development. The focal points provided the national experts with administrative and facilitative support.

Ms. Navone's strategy is that learning is done while the four national experts were receiving training; they were also taking part in conducting workshops for entrepreneur producers. While the focal points were launching a strategic outreach campaign to advertise the workshops to

hundreds of potential participants, the international experts were training the national experts in garnering, absorbing, incorporating and teaching the most up-to-date western market trends and marketing and imaging techniques, while seeking out potential entrepreneur producers and useful local resources.

In the search for local resources and the ensuing development of ideas, the group confronted a critical issue: how to cultivate a shared image while avoiding competition between the four countries. The project encouraged each group to identify and emphasize their strengths.

How do you translate "Western Market Trends" ?

One of the achievements of the project was its ability to provide and maintain consistency in training, documentation and communication between far-flung regions in four different countries, many people and a variety of languages. Ms. Navone developed all training and reference materials, and forms for document

ing information, in the international language of visual images.

**THE NETWORK:
 AN INTRICATE WEAVE**

As a picture of each country's resources and capacities gained shape, color, dimension and detail, the international experts developed a scheme to create an overarching high-quality regional "picture" or image, separat-

ing out and intertwining thematic strands so that patterns emerged in which both distinctions and connections could be discerned.

The UNIDO project management officers organized and staged events, and consultancy sessions, coordinating the schedules of international experts and two groups of national counterparts in four countries, while contending with multiple languages, international timetables, communications systems breakdowns, unforeseen illnesses, typhoons and other natural disasters. They were aided in these endeavors by the enthusiastic participation of some of the UNDP and UNIDO country representatives.

A European Study Tour

The national experts had the opportunity to observe market trends and marketing techniques on a two-week study tour in Frankfurt and Paris. The group combined visits to important trade fairs, showrooms and shops, and meetings with the international experts and UNIDO pro-



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ject officers for discussions of issues such as quality and pricing, and most importantly, of ideas and directions which could be applied to their work.

Behind the "Scenes"

Meanwhile, the international experts and UNIDO project officers had been networking to gain entry into "Scenes d'Interieur". The Study Technical initiated in a meeting with the management of the company organizing the fair, who not only welcomed the group's participation, but provided a generous discount on prime display space, and PR services free of charge.

The use of the informal networks and resources at hand, an essential entrepreneurial skill, was a critical part of the project operations and experience. It enabled the project to remain within its budget, and gave all participants first-hand experience in entrepreneurship in an undertaking that was itself run as an entrepreneurial venture.

ENTREPRENEURIAL METTLE: BENT BUT UNDENTED

A Setback

Upon returning from Europe in September, the national experts intensified their search for and work with participants, and solidified ideas for product development. The product design and prototyping phase was to have been launched in a series of on-site consultations with the international experts. At this time, both Paola Navone and Philip Cutler were struck with serious illnesses. They happily made complete recoveries, as did the project. But the ensuing time constraints put everybody's personal patience and entrepreneurial mettle to the test.

The Trial

This was a particularly difficult period for about 100 serious entrepreneur-producers who had made it to the "final" stage, knowing that only one-third of them would ultimately be selected to participate in "Scenes

d'Interieur". The exacting aesthetic and technological demands—not only with regard to beauty and flawless construction, but to being "right" in terms of sometimes elusive criteria that were difficult to convey—often drove the producers to work through the night, only to be sent back to the drawing board again.

After multiple consultations and attempts at prototype construction, 36 entrepreneur-producers were chosen to participate in the fair. Those not able to participate had received valuable assistance, and with continued support, have the potential to be competitive in international markets. For the 36, the work, it seemed, had really only just begun, for acceptance was conditional: the final prototype had to be right.

The Trial Run

A trial run for the products was slated for the Steering Committee Meeting in May 1991, when the Committee gathered in Jakarta to view the products for the first time.

Their enthusiasm gave renewed impetus to the preparations for Paris. The project management officers negotiated the logistics of fair participation. Paola Navone developed the aesthetic and technical master plan for the fair display, and under the supervision of Philip Cutler, the national experts and entrepreneur-producers engaged in final production, packing, and shipping operations.

Promotional and Sales Materials

The project placed a major emphasis on learning how to effectively communicate essential information about a product to buyers. To this end, the group also worked to produce the visual promotional and sales tools needed for the fair.

Business transactions were facilitated by a Sales Portfolio, consisting of an Information Sheet for each product, which included a color photograph and pertinent details. The products were also accompanied by a Buyers' Guide, organized by country and featuring color photographs and





a cover of hand-made paper. The Guide was produced by the Malaysian counterparts, who used their networks to pare down the production costs, the savings from which helped to finance the transport expenses for the exhibition.

"WE OPENED IN PARIS "

"Scènes d'Intérieur"

It had been anticipated that participation in the fair would be a learning experience, but nobody could have quite imagined its all-encompassing dimensions. The level of cooperation reached unprecedented heights as all stricter definitions of roles fell away. Everybody simply acted entrepreneurially, unpacking crates, fussing in the set-up, learning to perform as translators, sales managers, PR agents, and contract negotiators, helping each other to juggle press interviews, photo oppor-



tunities, and critical contact with buyers. This experience strengthened the most important network built in the project, namely the supportive connections between the entrepreneur-producers.

For those wishing to see evidence of the image-building venture's success in print, many of the products were featured in such leading journals as *Metropolitan Home*, *Elle*, *Vogue*, *Country Homes*, and *Family Circle*. The products attracted the attention of buyers for houses small and large, including Henri Bendel, Neiman Marcus, Williams and Sonoma, and Christian Dior. The ASEAN group received a letter of congratulations from the sponsors of "Scènes d'Intérieur" and an invitation to participate again in 1992, as well as numerous invitations to other fairs and exhibitions, and a commission for a display from Galeries Lafayette.

The image-building project had a secondary, unforeseen, yet welcome effect: multiple enquiries from serious buyers in Paris resulted in pre-orders amounting to US \$1,289,263

Encore: The Museum of Ethnology

The project team's ability to wrought success out of a difficult situation met its greatest challenge when it came to the disposal of the display prototypes after Paris. The choices seemed to have been restricted to shipping them back to ASEAN or having them destroyed. The UNIDO network in Vienna, the prudent use of project funds, and most importantly, the outstanding quality of the objects, made it possible to stage an exhibition at the Museum of Ethnology in Vienna. The exhibition was timed to coincide with the UNIDO General Conference, and received hundreds of visitors. Paola Navone adapted the fair display to the museum setting, where the products were given a recognition on par with outstanding museum collections of craft objects from ethnic groups all over the world.

After Paris, the entrepreneur-producers parted company with their prototypes in hopes that it would indeed be a final farewell, for it



became possible to offer them for sale in Vienna. How were they received? An eyewitness, who managed to escape from the exhibition with her booty secured, recounts: "The reaction, were astonishing. Ladies and gentlemen had to be restrained from fondling the objects and dismantling the display, and from near-skirmishes. "Madame," someone was overheard saying, "This is a museum, not a bazaar."

At the end of the first day, most of the objects had already been sold.

The Aftermath

The focal points, national experts and entrepreneur-producers were meanwhile back at home trying to cope with success. "Winding down" actually meant keeping up the tremendous momentum: fulfilling orders, expanding buyer contacts, and continuing image-building activities, to prevent ASEAN from fading from the dynamic, rapidly changing up-market scene.

Many of the entrepreneur-producers have experienced dramatic







changes since Paris and Vienna. While fulfilling a large order for Henri Bendel, one rural producer's entire operations were wiped out by the typhoons which swept through the Philippines in the winter of 1991. Fortunately, most of the changes have been positive: the majority of the participants have expanded their operations and increased the number of employees.

The year following the fair and the exhibition has seen a multitude of follow-up activities.

Indonesia reports that the project has had a positive impact on their small industry promotion network, enabling successful entrepreneur-producers to gain access to the unique "Bapak Angkat" or "Foster Father" scheme, whereby small industries receive assistance from large industries.

Malaysia has spearheaded plans for a future ASEAN regional project proposal, and is presently engaged in development projects targeting specific handicraft areas which had



been foregrounded in the course of the project. Malaysia has sponsored a successful ASEAN Handicrafts Expo, and is presently engaged in plans to construct a handicrafts museum.

Upon their return to Manila, the Philippine group staged exhibitions at the Product Development and Design Center and the Development Bank of the Philippines, and have participated in and won awards at numerous local market and trade fairs. A number of the project participants exhibited again at "Scenes d'Interieur" 1992 under the auspices of CITEM, and the continued guidance of Paola Navone, who was engaged to apply the design and imaging strategies which had made the project a success. CITEM director Ely Pinto credits the ASEAN Regional Handicrafts Project for the impetus to organize a Philippine

display for "Scenes d'Interieur."

"The project opened my eyes to the possibility of a fair forum for image building. The successes there made us realize that we were ready to enter that high-quality, low-volume handicraft market. The project was truly a stepping stone".

The Thai group have undertaken to spread their experience to other entrepreneur-producers through follow-up training seminars highlighted by presentations from fair participants, and a high-quality handicrafts competition and awards ceremony (in which many project participants were winners). The competition culminated in an exhibition of all entries, employing display design concepts gleaned from the project experience. The ASEAN regional project has been profiled for the general public through exhibitions in Bangkok and Chiang Mai. The exhibi-

tions were also used as the basis for an extensive lecture-visit series held for students of design. The Thai counterparts have since conducted a European study tour with an eye to entering "Scenes d'Interieur" 1994.

Epilogue

The Steering Committee gathered for the final time in October 1992. Apart from the tangible successes in image building and the individual successes of the entrepreneur-producers measured in terms of publicity, buyer contacts and orders, the project was deemed a tremendous learning experience for all involved. Perhaps the greatest evidence of the project's success in fostering regional cooperation is the fact that the Committee has unanimously agreed to form a Permanent Regional Secretariat, and to draft a proposal for a new project.

Center for International
Trade Expositions and Missions

